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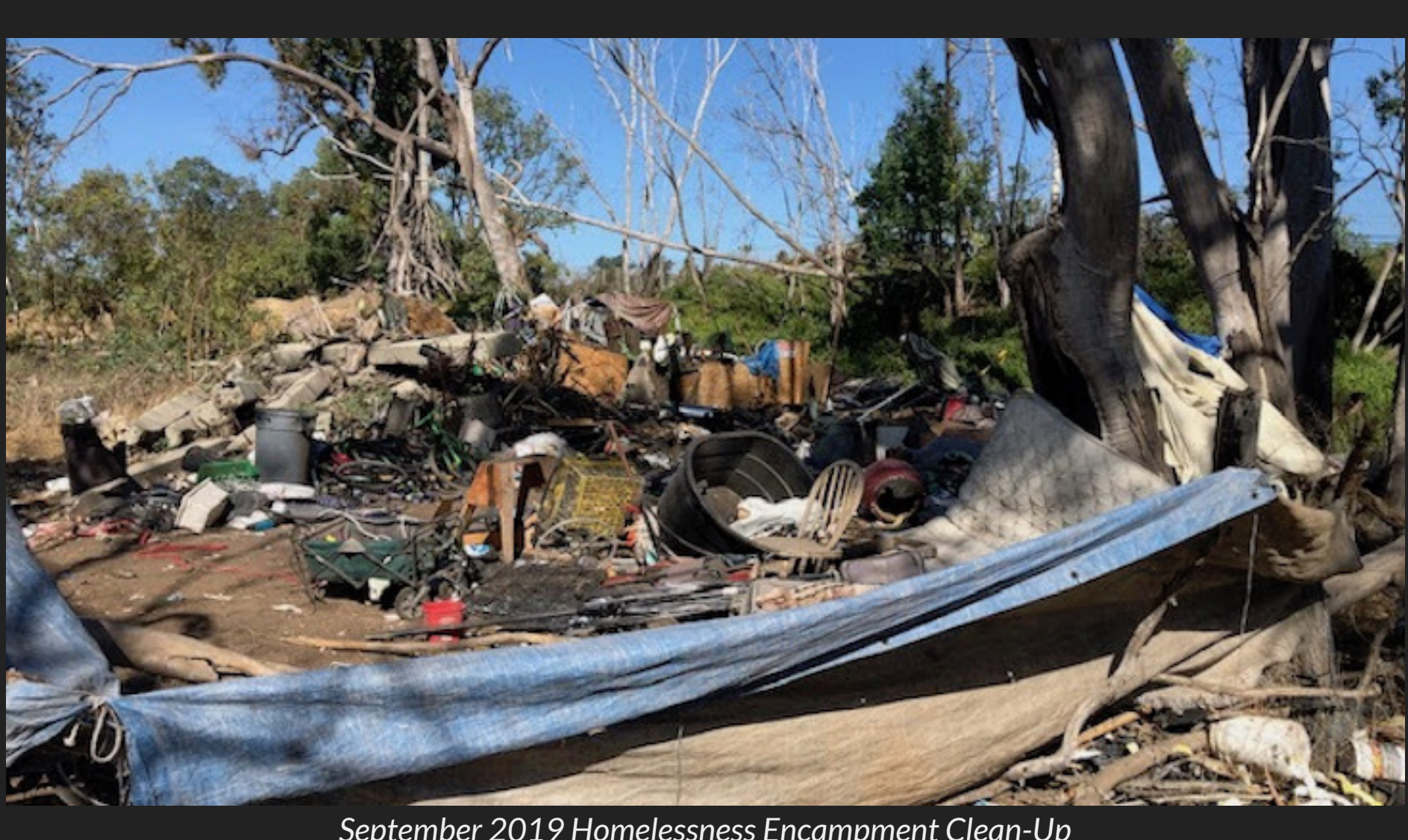
CITY OF GOLETA RESPONDS TO CONCERNS ABOUT RECENT HOMELESS ENCAMPMENT FIRES



September 2019 Homelessness Encampment Clean-Up

PUBLIC NEWS / JUL 15 2020 11:44 AM / BYCITYOFGOLETA / 19 COMMENTS / READS 3579

Source: City of Goleta

The City of Goleta is aware of the growing and understandable concern from the community surrounding two vegetation fires in the last two weeks that were started in homeless encampments along the Highway 101 corridor between Fairview Avenue and Los Carneros Road. We understand this a serious public safety concern and we do not take lightly the risk to life and property posed by these encampment fires. We are deeply grateful to our first responders for their quick response and work to knock these fires out quickly, but we recognize that these fires had the potential to cause great harm.

While we are not alone in dealing with homeless encampment fires and homelessness in general, it is admittedly one of the most challenging problems we face as a city. We are constantly balancing how to help this vulnerable population with the need to protect community members from the hazards associated with homeless encampments.

COVID-19 has complicated the issue of what the City and allied agencies are safely able to do to address homeless encampments. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines, unless individual housing is available, clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community which increases the potential for disease spread. The City, along with regional partners, is following the guidelines put in place during this pandemic for the safety of our community. The City has partnered with the County of Santa Barbara to support people experiencing homelessness in Goleta who are at greater risk if infected with COVID-19 by placing some of them in individual rooms and providing others with access to beds at PATH in Santa Barbara. Yet, we recognize that these options aren't enough to get Goleta's homeless population off the streets.

Mayor Paula Perotte said, "Prior to COVID-19, the City has been active and successful with clearing debris from homeless encampments and has collaborated with allied agencies to conduct cleanup efforts along the Highway 101 Railway corridor. In September of 2019, a four day clean-up resulted in the removal of more than 12 roll-off dumpsters full of debris."

It's important to note that the City does not own or control the involved property, which is owned by Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) or Caltrans, depending on the location. However, because of the critical nature of this corridor, the City created the UPRR/Highway 101 Corridor Safety Task Force over a year ago to increase interagency communication and plan actionable steps to keep the area clean and safe. The group met last week and are coordinating a plan to thin out the weeds/shrubs/fuel along the Highway 101 corridor.

The City is in close contact with outreach workers who make contact with homeless individuals living in encampments on a weekly basis and work to connect them with services. The City logs every complaint regarding a homeless encampment and subsequently sends an outreach worker to the location. We are also working closely with law enforcement and our Sheriff's Community Resource Deputy to increase activities in identifying and visiting homeless camps with our support services team to do everything we can to prevent future fires.

The City is in the final stages of drafting a comprehensive Homelessness Strategic Plan to holistically address the issue of homelessness in our community. The plan will help guide and coordinate efforts to prevent and address homelessness in the City of Goleta. The plan will be presented to the Homelessness Issues Standing Committee next week on July 22.

While the City respects and understands the need for the public health guidance discouraging homeless encampment clean-up efforts, it also recognizes the need to maintain the safety of homes and businesses near these encampment fires. Staff will continue to work diligently to prevent these fires in the future.

To report a homeless encampment, please contact Shanna Dawson in the Neighborhood Services and Public Safety Department at sdawson@cityofgoleta.org or via our City Assist system https://tinyurl.com/GoletaSubscriptions by going to Submit a Request and then clicking on Homeless Encampment/Illegal Camping.

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19 COMMENTS

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PITMIX JUL 15, 2020 11:50 AM

Good explanation of the difficulties posed by this situation.

MIDAIR JUL 15, 2020 12:00 PM

A big nothing burger

SBLETSGETALONG JUL 15, 2020 12:27 PM

In decades of research there has been no solution implemented to end homelessness. How much money has been spent on research this time? How much has been spent by Goleta, SB & the county over the last several decades?
The solution from the 1980s is "housing first"
The solution is using vacant land to build sanctioned tent cities with shelters that cost about$1,000 each and would provide each person about 144 square feet of personal living space. Then place mobile trailers on site for health workers and after Covid for common space for socializing, convenience store, mess hall, etc.
This would prevent encampments and dangerous fires.
All the research since the 80s has reinforced housing first before people can heal. Yet at no time has the govt taken the initiative to even try rent cities for SB locals who are down on their luck.
Instead they shuffle these poor people around, occasionally cleaning up Encampments that they are fully aware of forcing the homeless to be homeless again until they move back to the same camp.
As to liability if/when property is lost and possibility of lives not only will the government be liable but the land owners where the encampments are located as all parties are filly aware of the camps and are allowing them to occur.

3P14159 JUL 15, 2020 01:00 PM

People are motivated by what they have to lose, not what someone else thinks they have to gain. People will argue about this until it becomes a moot point - i.e., the city of Goleta is flattened to cinders.

PITMIX JUL 15, 2020 01:39 PM

What vacant land? Where is funding for shelters, food, medical care, showers, laundry facilities, rehab, mental illnesses, security? Once you develop this program, how do you stop people from coming here because it exists? People do not like spending lots of money on homeless prevention- they would rather spend it on cops and emergency room care because there is no other choice.

CHIP OF SB JUL 15, 2020 03:50 PM

3p14159, I think you will be proven correct. It's only a matter of time until one of these fires starts during a sundowner and burns to the ocean. It's a shame that too few people recognize the danger and the powers that be lack the inclination to take the necessary steps to prevent it. I'm sure they will find someone or something to blame. Buildings can be rebuilt, I just hope nobody gets hurt when the big fire happens.

A-1594856236 JUL 15, 2020 04:37 PM

The solution can only be federal land, like the acres of unused military reservation land, all over this country. This can be converted back into to work camps for those who claim they have no housing. If these barracks and tent camps were good enough for our GI's they are good enough for anyone else. There shall be no unfunded mandate requiring local communities to provide housing for every single person, with no upper limits, just because they to camp on their doorstep. That is absurd on its face. Run that one up the court system. We already have a huge welfare system that includes foodm housing and social services We are already doing "enough" for those who want to work within the system. But we are not doing enough for those who refuse to become part of the system. We are not telling them their only housing option is a federal work camp. End of discussion. Done with coddling and letting them kick us in the teeth - these are the "will nots". Well guess, what. Those coddling days are over. No more gaming the system.

A-1594866283 JUL 15, 2020 07:24 PM

Thank you 4:37. The best response yet.

A-1594866509 JUL 15, 2020 07:28 PM

If you build it they will come... and keep coming. All of our programs are just attracting the homeless from other areas.

A-1594885228 JUL 16, 2020 12:40 AM

Utah had a "housing first" initiative that included on-site counseling and other services and saved $17,000 per person per year in the use of police, ambulance, hospital, etc.

A-1594844507 JUL 15, 2020 01:21 PM

Vagrants who camp on the RR tracks and abuse drugs are not a "vulnerable" population. They know exactly what they are doing and what they can get away with.

A-1594885368 JUL 16, 2020 12:42 AM

Please educate yourself about mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction, suffered by many unhoused people. These are not choices.

LUCKY 777 JUL 15, 2020 02:15 PM

Make Trona a "Sister City" and buy up all the vacant houses for $1,000 each and ship off all the bums you find in the bushes. Send off the squads of social workers and government hacks who are supported by this well-funded industry, and let them earn their salaries up there living in single-wides.

CHIP OF SB JUL 15, 2020 02:21 PM

I think the fire danger and the homeless / drug addict camps are two separate and distinct issues that require separate and distinct solutions. The fire danger is caused by an excessive build up of vegetative fuels along the freeway, train tracks, and countless other public spaces like the park at lake Los Carneros. It doesn't matter whether a drug addict ignites these fuels or a cigarette from a passing car, the resulting fire will burn just the same. The solution is clearing out the fuel, which means thinning and pruning trees, mowing grass, etc. I'm very glad to hear the safety task force is working on a plan to address this along the freeway and tracks. This will be a good start, but there are many other overgrown areas where excessive fuel loads are endangering the community. I hope this extreme fire hazard is addressed before the worst happens, because the worst will inevitably happen sooner or later if we don't fix this. In order to keep our community safe from fire, the fuel must be removed. The growing population of homeless / drug addicts presents many of its own public safety hazards, but the solution to that problem should be the topic for another article.

A-1594855591 JUL 15, 2020 04:26 PM

Bogus excuse - if we clean out the RR camps they will take their disease into the wider community. Guess what, they already are - take a look at our parks down town. streets and local business doorways. No excuses and no more enabling. What is Solvang doing right and what are we doing so wrong. Put Union Pacific on the carpet, give them notice and demand they mitigate this clear public safety hazard. Where is our federal representative- Rep Carbajal? If he works so hard to protect us from oil pipe lines, why won't he protect us from federally regulated RR maintained fire hazards? He can easily get legislation passed prohibiting human habitation along RR right aways, demand construction of high barrier fences, regular inspections and camera surveillance of RR tracks in all urbanized areas . Look what we already demand for 24/7 oil pipeline surveillance. The same for RR track survelliance. Plus strict liability for all damages from fires started on RR property, due to RR hazard mitigation negligence. Just like the strict liability for fires the utility companies now face.

A-1594885570 JUL 16, 2020 12:46 AM

4:26 p.m. - If it was all this easy, don't you think it would have been done years ago.....

SIMPLETON JUL 15, 2020 05:39 PM

Our community is ready for a work party cleanup of the RR tracks.
Order Marborg rolloffs to be dropped along tracks.
Day 1 training and education
Day 2-5 cleanup

Where do we sign up?

RHS JUL 15, 2020 06:33 PM

Goleta has been totally absent in the movement to assist/solve the homeless issue. Like Carpinteria they have turned a blind eye to the issue and let the city of SB show some consciousness and care toward this population. If Goleta had ONE homeless shelter or any homeless housing they could perhaps claim to be victims but they have none and they are malefactors. The world needs us to share with the needy and disabled and mentally damaged and addicted rather than to push them into someone else's turf.

A-1594885664 JUL 16, 2020 12:47 AM

RHS - Thank you, especially for your last sentence.

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Exactly. And I second the
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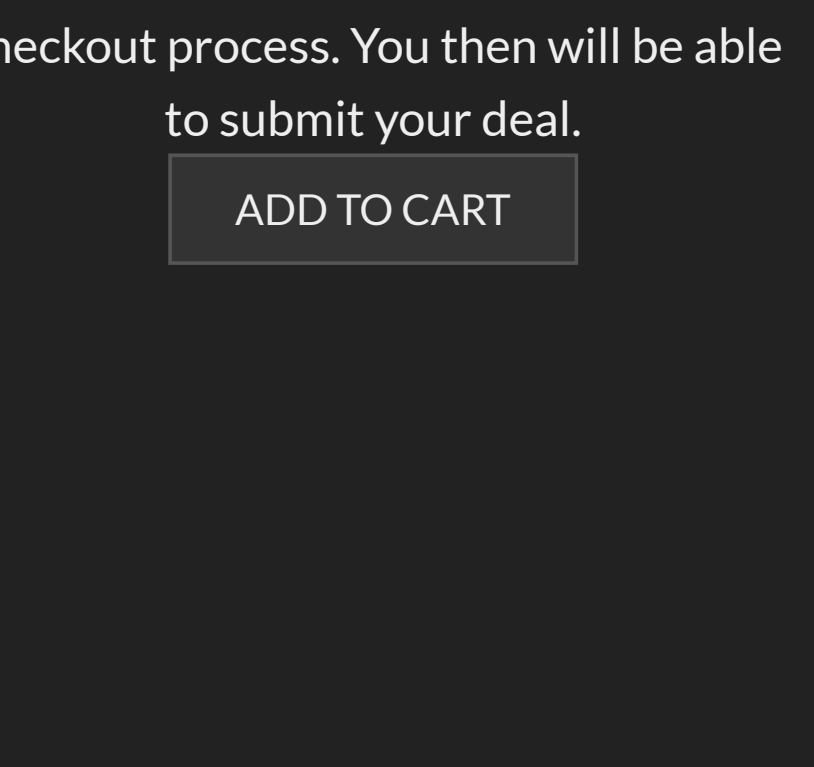

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